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SUBJECT: EU ELECTION TEAM LEADER DENOUNCES ETHIOPIA
ELECTIONS, CALLS FOR "BUSINESS AS USUAL" TO END

REF: (A) ADDIS ABABA 3117 (B) ADDIS ABABA 3122

Classified By: PRMOFF MARC J. MEZNAR. REASON 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (U) Summary. At a September 13 hearing of the European Parliament, the Chief Observer of the EU's election observation mission in Ethiopia, MEP Ana Gomes (Portuguese Socialist), condemned the GoE's handling of the redress process and related human rights abuses. She urged the international community to step up diplomatic pressure on the Ethiopian government, particularly at the upcoming events in New York. Gomes also said the European Commission should reconsider its aid to Ethiopia which amounts to 500 million euros per year. A final report on the elections, which will be released in the coming weeks, will not be substantially different from the interim report, but will include recommendations for electoral reform. Gomes described a good working relationship with the Carter Center and claimed the election observers helped ensure that over 90% of eligible voters cast ballots. End Summary.

2. (U) Gomes began her presentation to the Foreign Affairs Committee by outlining Ethiopia's strategic importance: 70 million citizens who set an example of Christian-Muslim toleration; troubled neighborhood, including Somalia and Sudan, as well as a boundary dispute with Eritrea; diplomatic links with the Gulf and headquarters of the African Union; and, a Marxist-style regime in power that showed an opening to democracy by allowing multi-party relations. She said that the EU's decision to send the largest group of election observers (over 160 spread throughout the country) reflected Ethiopia's strategic importance. Gomes added that the GoE's unprecedented openness in the campaign also influenced the decision to observe these landmark elections. She credited the involvement of the international community as the catalyst for the "stunning" turnout of over 90% of eligible voters.

Timeline: Promising Start to Poison Pen Letter

3. (U) According to Gomes, hints of trouble surfaced before the elections when questions were raised about the independence of the National Elections Board and during the elections themselves when NGOs were prevented from observing. However, "things started to unravel" in a dramatic way the night of the elections when results indicated the opposition was headed for a landslide victory in the capital. Gomes traced the major developments, as follows:

-- May 15: Gomes issued a preliminary report, which was basically positive but reflected concern about the transparency of the counting;

-- May 24: The EU was forced to release a statement because of growing concern that the results were being manipulated and because of growing popular suspicion;

-- June 8: GoE security forces brutally repressed protestors, killing 42 and arresting 5000 (including children). Gomes praised the work of EU Member State embassies for their work in getting 4500 prisoners released (without being charged). Gomes stated that the GoE began harassing opposition leaders and restricting the media (particularly radio and television).

-- August 21: Re-runs were conducted in several regions correctly, despite poor organization (particularly in the Somali Region).

-- August 25: Complaints about the redress process resulted in a preliminary statement of the EU observer mission which concluded that the process had not met international standards because of "serious intimidation and human rights abuses." As an example, she cited maneuvers by the sitting Parliament to financially strangle jurisdictions won by the opposition. PM Meles, furious reaction was made public in a 14-page letter published by an official newspaper (reftel a).

-- August 29: The UK Presidency released a statement backing

Gomes' findings, noting her report was "balanced and impartial". A similar public statement backing the Gomes report was issued jointly by Commissioners Ferrero-Waldner and Michel.

Gomes says GoE must face consequences

14. (U) Gomes said that despite the problems, the dramatic increase for the opposition from 12 to 182 seats represented a victory for democracy. She said that the "serious" human rights violations committed by the GoE should not be ignored by the international community. Gomes noted that this week was "crucial" in determining whether it would be business as usual at the UN or whether the GoE would be rebuffed. Gomes was adamant that the GoE's actions "must have consequences" in the EU-Ethiopia relationship.

15. (U) She also said the European Commission should reconsider its annual assistance package of 500 million euros, which includes substantial budget support. Gomes noted that UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari has expressed frustration at the way humanitarian aid is distributed (excluding NGOs from the process) and land distribution issues. MEP Michael Gahler (German Conservative) agreed with Gomes' analysis and lamented that EU governments tend to support the status quo; he also criticized European Commission officials who "have an interest in playing down massive electoral fraud" in Ethiopia.

16. (U) Regarding the U.S., Gomes said she hoped that diplomatic efforts aimed at "stopping terror will not allow dictatorships (like Ethiopia) to continue operating." Gomes reported very good cooperation with the Carter Center, particularly during the redress phase which began June 10. Because neither side had expected the post-election phase to continue for so long, it was essential that the various monitoring teams coordinate their activities. She expected the analysis of the Carter Center to track essentially along the same lines as the EU's (reftel b).

Next Steps

17. (U) Gomes expects to issue the final report within the next few weeks. She said it will not be substantially different from the preliminary one, but will be more forward-leaning in nature. One recommendation will be for Ethiopia to compile a permanent registry of voters (instead of the lists drawn up for each election) to reduce fraud.

18. (U) Responding to a concern expressed by MEP Veronique de Keyser (Belgian Socialist), Gomes discounted the possibility that the final report might provoke a new popular uprising and more deaths, noting the lack of popular reaction to the interim report. She contrasted this with PM Meles' emotional response, saying that a 14-page letter was a tacit acknowledgement that he could not continue doing business as usual.

19. (U) During the Q & A period following her report, various MEPs praised Gomes' work, defended her actions and even suggested she should win the EU's Sakharov prize for defending human rights.

110. (U) DG RELEX Head of Unit for Human Rights and Democratization Rolf Timans, said that the European Commission "to a large extent" supports the Gomes report and praised the "huge effort" she made. However, he said that he would wait for the final report before making a conclusive analysis. Timans also said that Commissioners Ferrero-Walder and Michel will meet with PM Meles in New York in order to clarify the Commission's support for the observation mission. He said that it was impossible to disassociate the technical from the political issues which the report raised. Above all, he said that the Commission hoped to stabilize the situation in Ethiopia in order to prevent further bloodshed and to help the GoE open a healthy dialogue with opposition groups.

Comment

111. (C) Behind the scenes, there has been a lot of post-play quarterbacking in Brussels about Ana Gomes' handling of the Ethiopian elections. The carefully chosen words by the EU Council and the Commission are aimed at standing up for human rights and supporting the independent mission of the European Parliament while not jeopardizing the EU's relations with Ethiopia. (Note. Tension with Ethiopia has already been aggravated by the boundary dispute situation. End Note.) Gomes cannot be written off as a "wacky" Parliamentarian. She is a veteran Portuguese diplomat who as Ambassador to

Indonesia at the time of East Timor's independence gained valuable experience in handling delicate political matters. Furthermore, her erstwhile supporter in Addis, EU Chief of Mission Timothy Clarke, has a solid technical background with his previous portfolio as EuropeAid's head of unit for Democracy and Human Rights in Brussels. (That he is the brother of UK Home Minister Charles Clarke undoubtedly facilitates cooperation with the UK Presidency.) One EU insider said that despite these professional credentials, neither was prepared for the aggressive tenacity of the Ethiopian authorities.

12. (U) USEU hopes that the upcoming meetings between A/S Frazer and Gomes in New York and with USAID D/AA AFR Almquist in Washington can further improve transatlantic cooperation in observing elections and strengthening democracy in Africa.

McKinley

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